

GEORGE RILEY WILLIS HOUSE AND KITCHEN (Edward Fulcher House) HABS No. NC-359
Cape Lookout National Seashore
Portsmouth Vicinity
Carteret County
North Carolina

HABS
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2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GEORGE RILEY WILLIS HOUSE AND KITCHEN (Edward Fulcher House) HABS No. NC-359

Location:

Cape Lookout National Seashore
Portsmouth Village Historic District
Carteret County
North Carolina

U.S.G.S. Wainwright Quadrangle (7.5')
Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 4,03,000E - 38,81,000N
(Approximately 800 feet, 288 degrees
from Portsmouth Life Saving Service
Station)

Present Owner:

National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior
P. O. Box 690
Beaufort, North Carolina 28516

Present Use:

This building is vacant

Statement of Significance:

This house is a typical example of vernacular architecture of Portsmouth Village in the first decade of the 20th Century. As a common house of the village in the early 1900's, this small home contributed to the general historic scene of Portsmouth Village, an historic district entered on the National Register of Historic Places for its importance as the only existing village on the Core Banks south of Ocracoke Inlet. The tangible or physical significance of the house is severely compromised now because it has collapsed into almost complete ruin. "Preservation" would require total reconstruction.

PART A. PHYSICAL CONTEXT AND RELATIONSHIP TO SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT

The George Riley Willis House lies in the Portsmouth Village Historic District. Portsmouth Village is located on the north end of Core Banks at Ocracoke Inlet. Core Banks is part of the North Carolina barrier island system known as the Outer Banks. The district encompasses approximately 250 acres and includes about 20 widely scattered buildings situated on low ground mostly surrounded and broken by saltwater marshes. Through its years of partial abandonment, the village has been heavily encroached by vegetation as the natural plant community has begun reclaiming its former range. This extremely vigorous plant community is characterized by wax myrtle, greenbriar and similar bushy species. The National Park Service has been able to maintain some open areas to, as much as possible, provide firebreaks for preventing wildfire from spreading to structures and preserve the historic scene. Because of the meandering system of roads and yards and heavy intervening vegetation, the visitor experiences a compartmentalized view of the Village. There are few locations where more than two or three sites can be seen from one point.

The house lies in the northeastern quadrant of the historic district, approximately 750 feet west of Portsmouth Life Saving Service Station and approximately 100 feet southeast of the Captain Dave Willis House. The house is in an area maintained as grassland by the National Park Service. A road connecting the Village with a frequently used airstrip and eastern shore of north Core Banks passes within 50 feet of the house. Detailed documentation of the house location is available on the "Portsmouth Historic Zone Base Map"; the map is preserved in Cape Lookout National Seashore archives.

PART B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE IN RELATION TO PORTSMOUTH VILLAGE

Portsmouth Village was established in 1753 by an Act of the North Carolina General Assembly.¹ The village was important for its

¹U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, A Survey History of Cape Lookout National Seashore: North Carolina. F. Ross Holland, Jr., Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, 30 January 1968, page 38.

location on Ocracoke Inlet. This inlet was the major shipping route through the Outer Banks to other early important colonial North Carolina ports. The village served as the all-important transshipment point for large heavily laden ships that could not get past the shallow waters of Ocracoke Inlet until part of their cargoes were transferred to "lighters," small ships that could cross the shoals. The large ships were reloaded after they had crossed Ocracoke Bar. Portsmouth Village provided storage and support facilities for this lightering industry. This industry was very successful and by 1842, two-thirds of North Carolina's exports passed through Ocracoke Inlet. The village's population was highest in 1860, with 650 persons.

Economic changes and the Civil War caused residents to leave Portsmouth Village. Ocracoke Inlet had become shallower and nature opened a new, deeper inlet at Hatteras in the 1840's.² The shipping industry forsook Portsmouth Village and shifted north to take advantage of the more favorable route through Hatteras Inlet.³ Many residents fled when the Northern Army arrived on the Outer Banks. Most never returned after the war because of economic reasons. The village's population steadily declined; 320 in 1870, 222 in 1880, 104 in 1930, to 17 in 1956.⁴ Although the village dates from the Colonial period, extant structures represent a period from the last decades of the 19th Century to the first decades of the 20th Century.⁵

²Department of the Interior, Survey History, page 47.

³Ibid.

⁴U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Portsmouth Village, Cape Lookout National Seashore (one-sheet pamphlet), Cape Lookout National Seashore, Beaufort, North Carolina, 1986.

⁵U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, Portsmouth Village, by Lenard E. Brown, Regional Historian, Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service, Atlanta, Georgia, June 1977, page 3 of "Statement of Significance."

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The house was constructed around 1919 by Edward Fulcher.⁶ The village had declined into a little fishing town by the time the house was built.

The house is a typical structure of its period. Unfortunately, it is so decayed that major portions are totally collapsed. Parts that have not fallen are in imminent danger of collapse. The house is no longer an important element of the historic scene because its original appearance is highly altered by deterioration.

PART C. SPECIFIC HISTORY OF THE HOUSE

It was common knowledge to Portsmouth Village residents that this house was built on its present site by Edward Fulcher.⁷ Edward was a member of the Portsmouth Coast Guard Station crew; he also operated a small store nearby the house.⁸ Soft drinks and candy were sold from the store.⁹ Other Coast Guard men and their families lived in the house in the following years. George Riley Willis, after whom the house is named, lived in the house in later years. Willis was a commercial fisherman.¹⁰

⁶Telephone interview with Mr. Levin Fulcher, (919/986-2386), Box 43, Hatteras, North Carolina 27493, 18 February 1989. Notes: Levin was raised on part of north Core Banks known as Sheep Island. When he was about 14 years old, he helped his brother, Edward Fulcher, build the house. Levin moved from north Core Banks when he was 17 years old; he is 83 years of age at this writing.

⁷Telephone interview with Marian Babb (919/728-2283), 109 Legion Drive, Beaufort, North Carolina 28516, 16 February 1989. Notes: Marian Babb grew up and lived in Portsmouth Village until 1971. She is very interested in and proud of Portsmouth Village history. She is 67 years old at this writing.

⁸Fulcher, Interview.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

PART D. CONSTRUCTION DETAILS AND PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF SITE

This one story, clapboard, gable house was constructed from materials salvaged from two other houses in Portsmouth Village because materials were difficult to transport to Portsmouth Village.¹¹ The house floor plan is "T" shaped. The main part of this wood frame building consists of two rooms, at the top of the "T." The remainder of the house is the ruins of a covered porch and kitchen. Physical remains of the covered porch, which connected the kitchen to the main part of the structure, have almost entirely vanished. The kitchen siding is board and batten. Detailed drawings are permanently filed in archives of Cape Lookout National Seashore. Photographs, detailed drawings and an "Architectural Data Form" (Form 10-920) were accepted in January 1989 by the Southeast Regional Office of the National Park Service for submission to the Library of Congress under the Historic American Buildings Survey process. Although a "lawn" is maintained around the house, brush grows close against and inside it.

¹¹Ibid.

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Form 10-920
(June 1983)

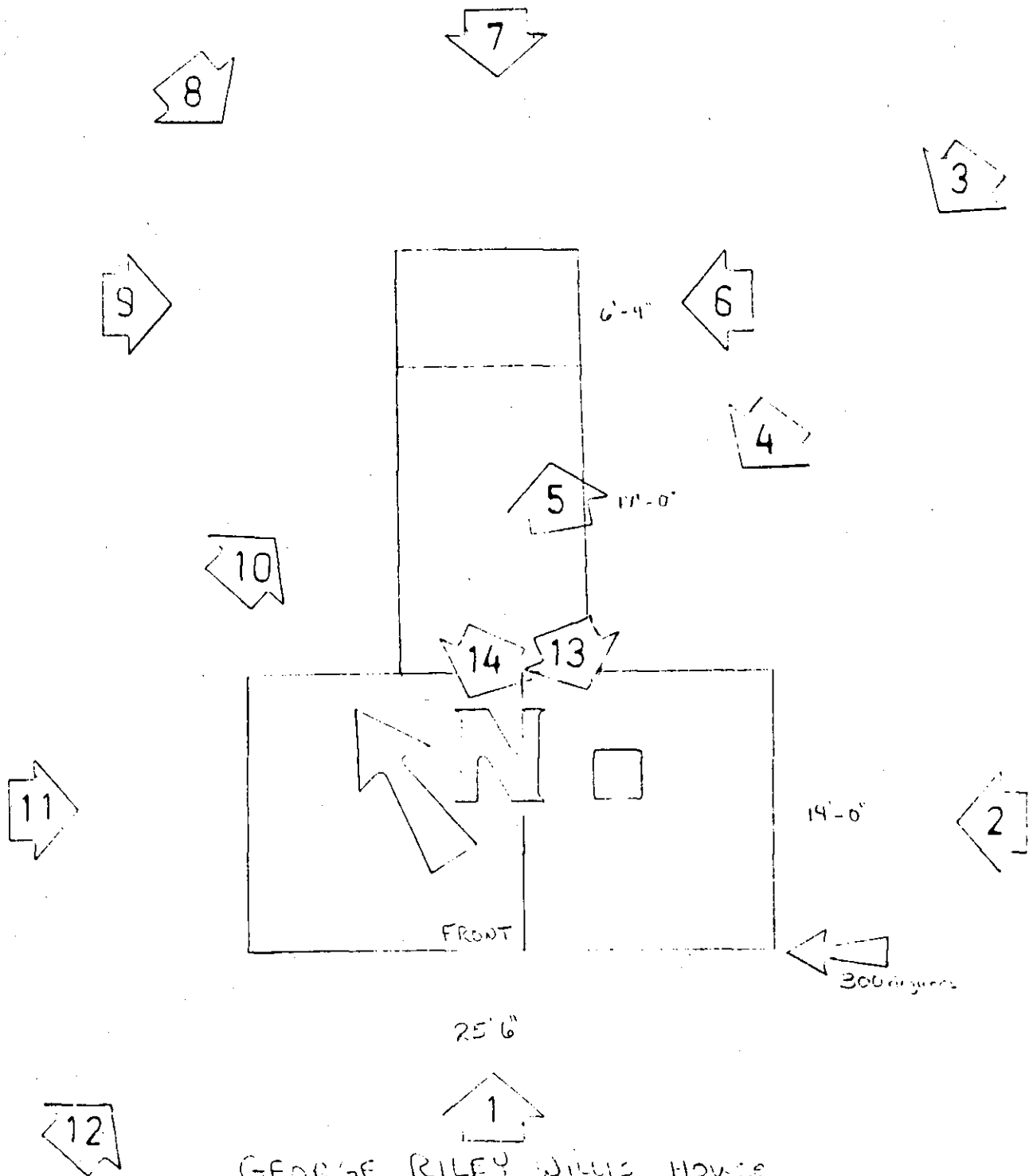
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

| | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| STATE | COOUNTY | TOWN OR VICINITY |
| North Carolina | Carteret | Portsmouth Village Historic Dist. |
| HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) | | HABS NO. |
| George Riley Willis House and Kitchen (original owners) NPS # 520 | | |
| SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE | | |
| COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) | | |
| See attached map for location in Portsmouth Village | | |
| DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) | ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE) | |
| 1919 (oral history, photos) | No known original architect | |
| SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) | | |
| The house was constructed of wood in a vernacular manner and used as a family residence. | | |
| STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE) | | |
| MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) | | |
| Wood construction with floor joist on 24" centers, studs on 27" centers, ceiling joist on 32" centers, and rafters on 28" centers. | | |
| SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE) | | |
| Main house: 14'-0" x 25'-6". Kitchen and connecting porch: 23'-4" x 9'-3" | | |
| See attached architectural drawing | | |
| EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE | | |
| Connecting porch between the main house and the kitchen. | | |
| INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED) | | |
| See drawing | | |
| MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES | | |
| The structure was constructed around 1919 on Sheep Island, South of Portsmouth Village. It was moved to the present location around 1933. No other additions are known. | | |
| PRESENT CONDITION AND USE | | |
| The house and kitchen are in an advanced state of decay, beyond stabilization. To maintain a house on the site would require complete reconstruction. | | |
| OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE | | |
| SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) | | |
| Oral history, interviews, historic photos, written publications | | |
| COMPILER, AFFILIATION | DATE | |
| Don Parrish, National Park Ranger, CALO | 1-4-89 | |

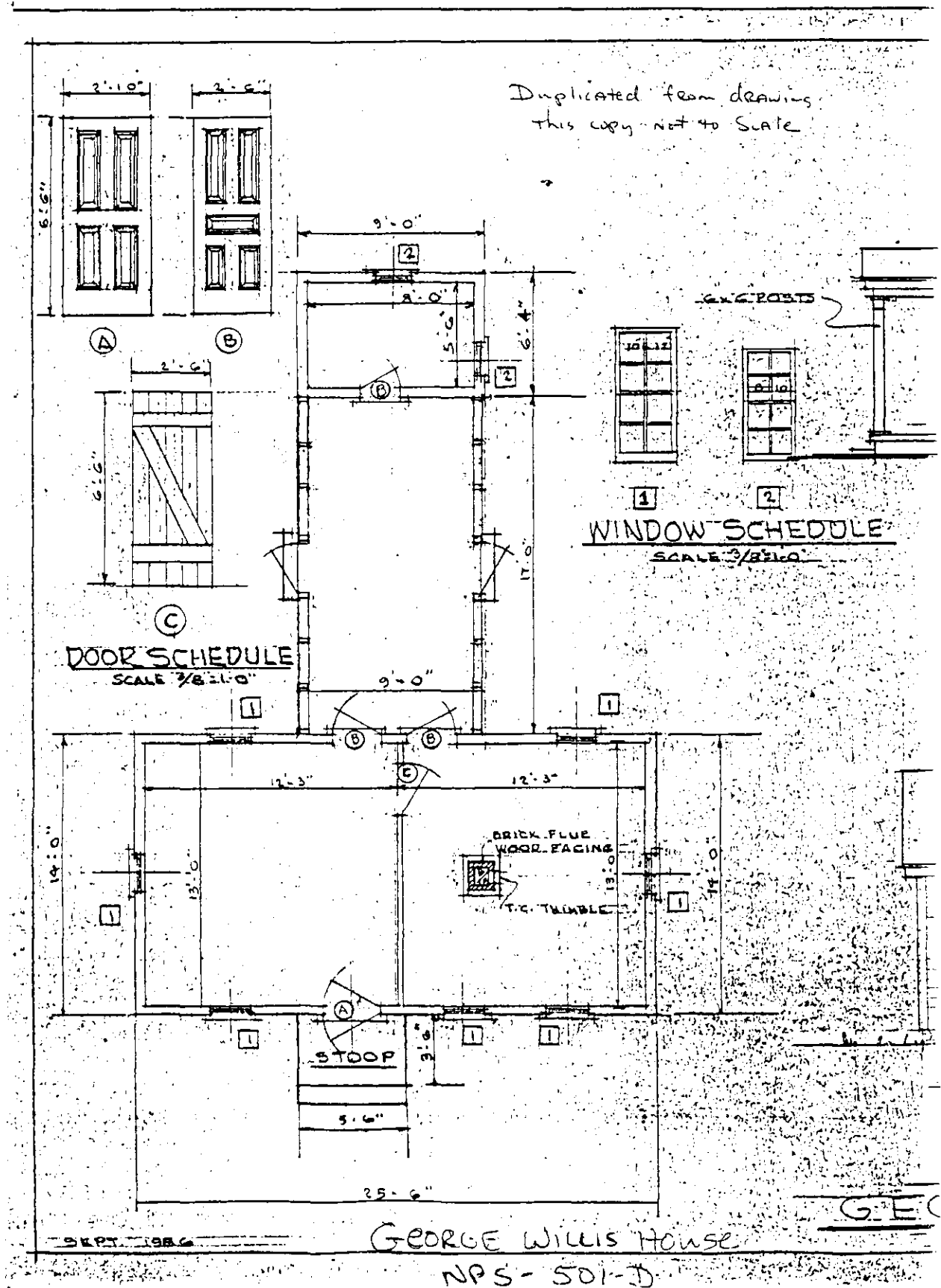
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Photo Positions 1-10-59

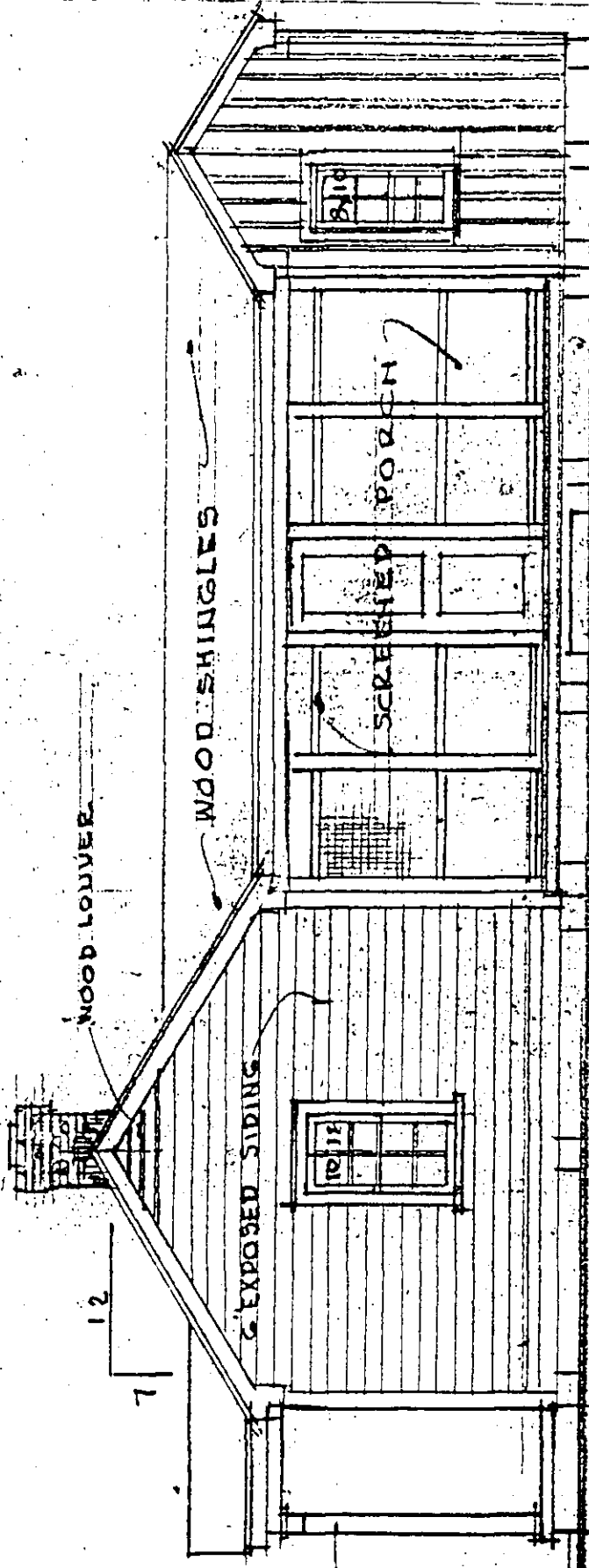


GEORGE RILEY WILLIS HOUSE
NPS # 520

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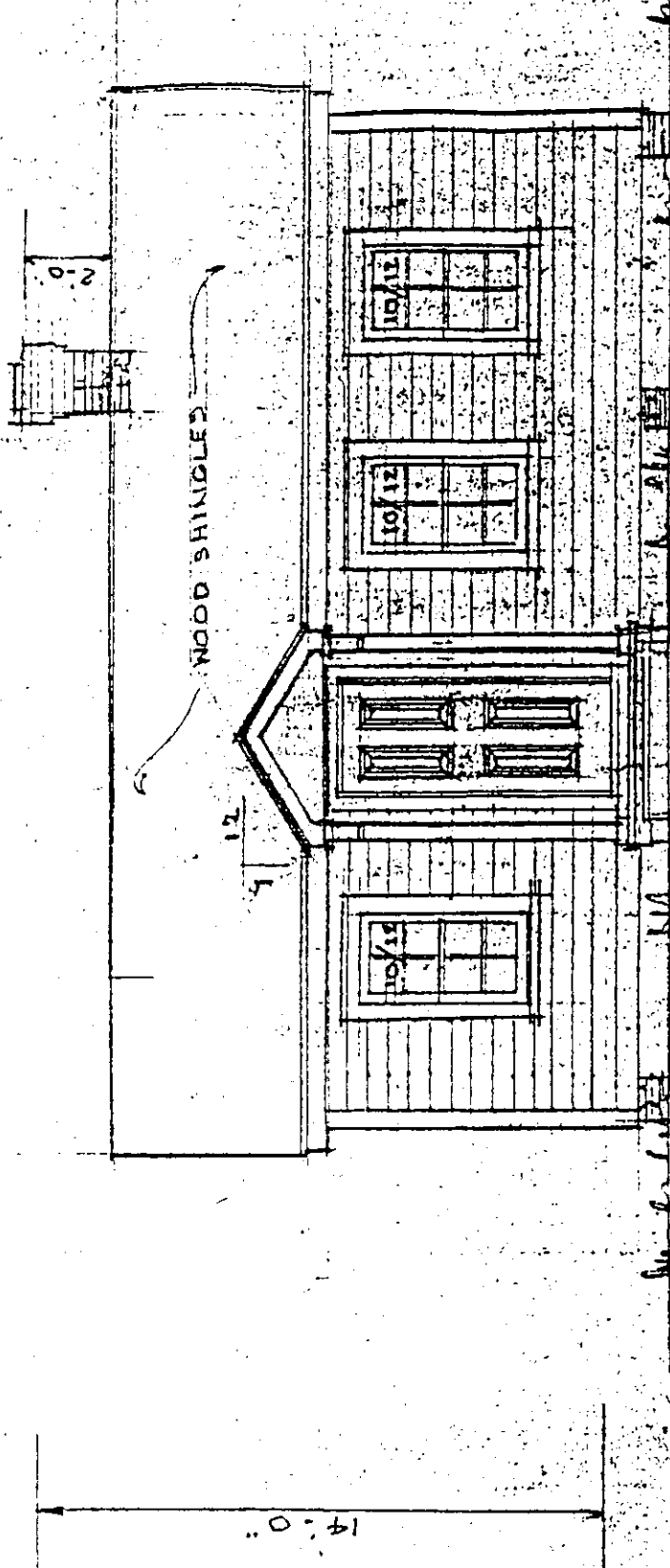
SIDE ELEVATION

SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

GEORGE WILLIS HOUSE

E

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this copy not to Scale



Wood & Hinkle

FRONT ELEVATION

SCAIF 1/4" x 1" = 0

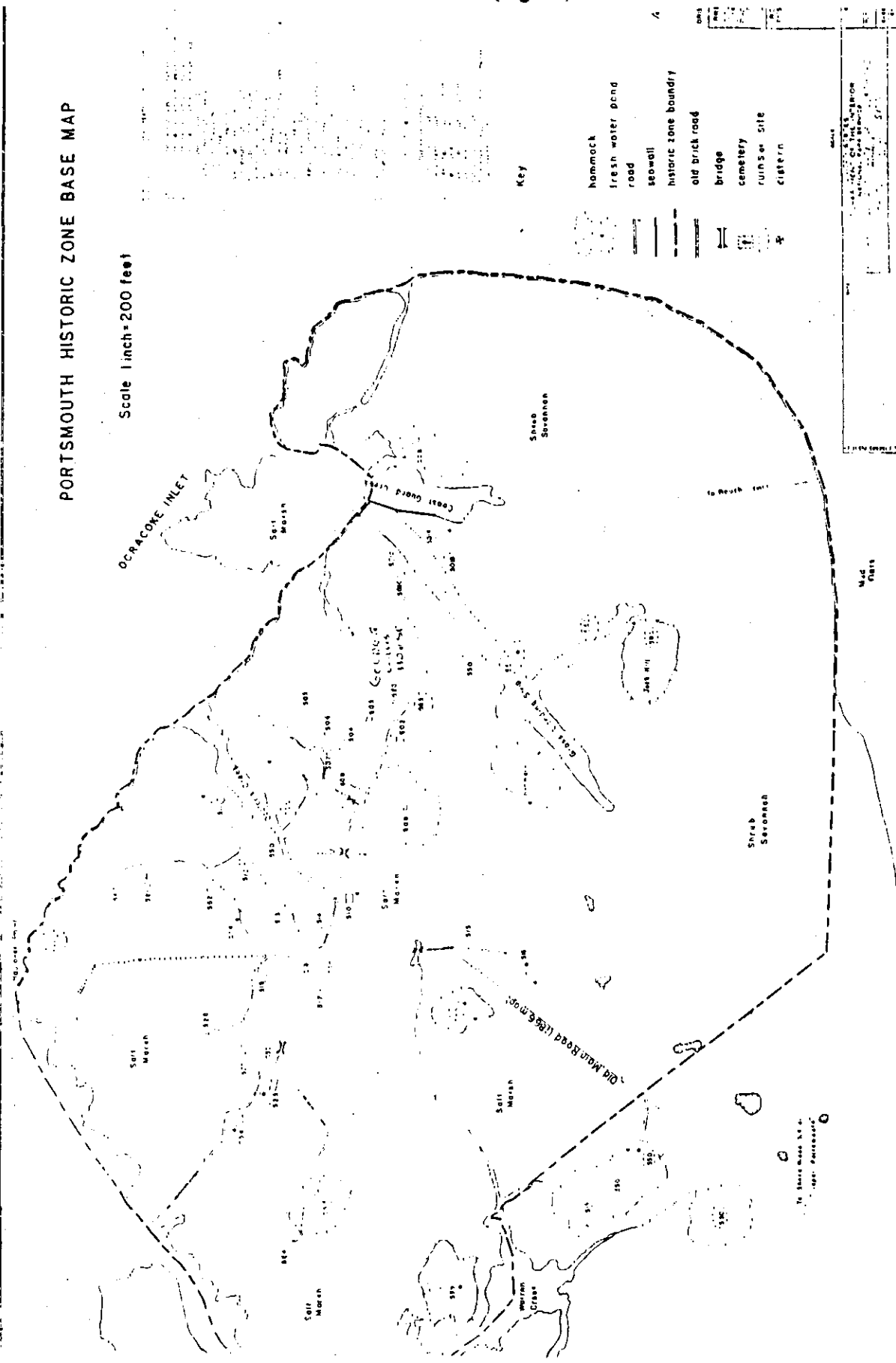
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GEORGE WILLIS HOUSE

POZ-T5MOOTH.N.C

PORTSMOUTH HISTORIC ZONE BASE MAP

Scale 1 inch=200 feet



Key

- hammock
- fresh water pond
- road
- seawall
- historic zone boundary
- old brick road
- bridge
- cemetery
- ruin site
- cistern

SCALE
1 inch = 200 feet

PORTSMOUTH HISTORIC ZONE
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250
1980